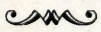
Television and Education

By FRANKLIN DUNHAM

Chief of Radio-Television, U. S. Office of Education



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"THE VALUES inherent in television" as a medium of instruction . . . Its "potential of service" in both elementary and adult education . . . Increasing interest in building programs of wide and general educational appeal.

SINCE 1945 the American system of broadcasting has consisted of two major elements — commercially operated stations rendering a service of entertainment, information and general education to the public and non-commercial stations concerned principally with education to the classroom, to the home and to the community, in the form of adult education. It is true that we have had both types of stations since broadcasting began, nearly thirty years ago, but the action of the Federal Communications Commission in 1945, definitely setting aside the 88-92 megacycle band for the exclusive use of education's own stations, clinched forever the pattern of American broadcasting. This is our "middle way." Obviously, we did not want government-owned radio in the United States. Other countries either have that form exclusively or some, like Canada, Australia and France, and many countries in South America, as well, have both systems, operating competitively — private operation *vs.* government.

THE RESULT of this type of operation puts the burden of educational broadcasting on the State-operated stations and allows the privately owned stations to meet levels of taste in their respective countries which produce maximum audiences and, likewise, maximum profits.

We just don't do it that way. Our network and independently operated commercial stations glory in their opportunity to serve the public with instantaneous news flashes, excellent commentators, top sports coverage, and programs of general educational merit and high public acceptance. It is true that the admonition "to serve the public interest, convenience and necessity" is a part of their legal obligation to retain their licenses but it has also proved to be "good radio business" — as any recognized service-of-value is in any business.

Then why the necessity to set aside special frequencies for the exclusive use of education? One reason is that we place a high value on education, higher perhaps than any country in the world. Our mass-production methods alone are a result of education. Budgets for extensive research are a part of our planned business operations. Research is simply applied education. As a practical people, we know the values in education. If we err on this side of science against the value inherent in the arts, it's because science has done more for us. If we produce little literature of lasting value, it's because we like to test things of the moment. We are a dynamic, restless people. Sweden produces eight times as many books per capita each year for its people as we do. Up to 1920, Universal, a great printing plant in Leipzig, produced more classical music than all the rest of the world combined. France, up to this time, has produced more modern art than all the countries combined, including the United States.

OUR GREATEST BLESSING is growth — growth mentally, physically and spiritually. We have more boys and girls in high schools and colleges per capita than any other country. We have one of the highest health quotients in the world and we have, regardless of the skeptics, one of the highest spiritual outlooks in the world. For example, the Roman Catholic Church, spread over the whole world, has no more vital and consistent church-goers and church supporters than those in the United States. At the same time, with our glorious privilege of freedom of religious thought our people live in a spiritual climate where they are free to make choices; every shade of thinking into the material world and the impact of the supernatural is present in our country.

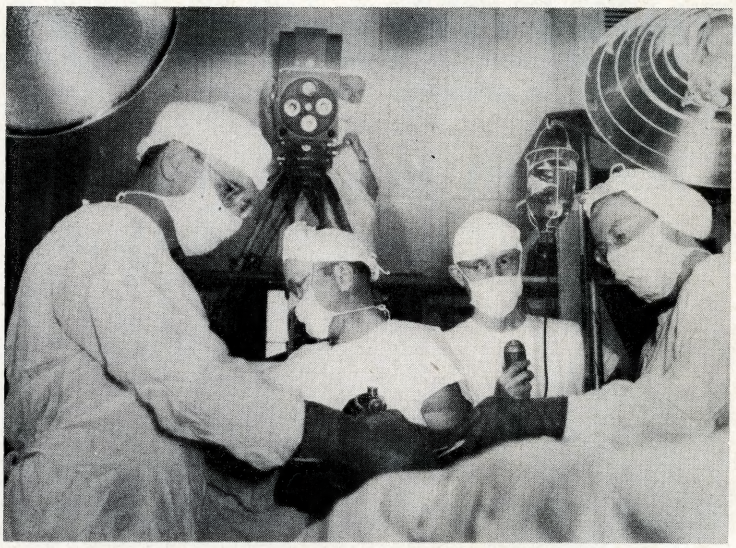
This condition of freedom to speak, to act, to assemble, to move about on foot or on wheels or across continental skies, makes us the envy of every yearning soul in every country. And we have not stopped growing!

To such a people radio came about thirty years ago — a new gadget for our growth. Owen D. Young was its prophet, for he, as a leader of men, saw its potential of service to mankind and particularly to the United States. In 1926 the National Broadcasting Company was formed as the first commercial network. CBS soon followed and Mutual was born a few years later. Finally NBC split up its service into what is now known as NBC and ABC (American Broadcasting Company). David Sarnoff of RCA, owner of NBC, looked far ahead to sight and sound, pouring millions of stockholders' dollars

into television. In 1936, fifty sets were distributed in New York to receive experimental programs, and intermittently until 1940 programs emanated from the tower atop the Empire State Building, highest point above Manhattan Island. The writer had the privilege of building some of these experimental programs in science, art, literature, current events, drama and music. We wanted to know what we could do with television. We found out a great deal. The result is the extraordinary service of television, just recently developed to serve the entire continent over nation-wide network operations.

Television has caught the imagination of the American public as it has nowhere else in the world. The writer recently returned from Europe where he saw television in England, France, Holland and Germany. In all other lands its service is limited. The greater part of the world has never seen it — nor will, for many years to come.

The fact that it is here is a tribute to American ingenuity, doggedness of character and the profit motive, for return on capital investment to reinvest in its further development or in any other development of public value was essential.



Televising an operation. TV has proved invaluable to doctors "for demonstration of surgical skills."

The value inherent in television as a sight and sound means of communication are being demonstrated every day. It is the means par excellence for showing people how to do things. It is definitely a "how" medium, as are motion pictures when applied to the learning process. But it is more flexible, easy to revise and to improve, and it is far cheaper. Its audience may easily be in the millions, with per capita cost an infinitesimal fraction of a mill; and no necessity exists for turning it into a film-version until (if ever) it is perfect.

It is also a "what" medium, for it presents a true picture of any object. It is, moreover, a "when" medium, for any event may be recorded when it is actually happening. The doctors have grabbed it, clutching its values to them for demonstration of surgical skills, treatment of bone structure defects, skin diseases and a thousand other applications to the medical field. The American Medical Association and the U. S. Public Health Service do not hesitate to say that it is nothing short of a boon to the entire medical profession. The scientists see its value also for demonstration, particularly to bring about a layman's understanding of science, though its application to straight laboratory work is a major contribution to scientific research in itself.

Children in the classroom are captivated by it. Not only does it capture them but they capture it — what it is intending to say to them. It has the ability to (1) attract and hold interest, (2) to stimulate the imagination and (3) to aid in retentiveness.

A recent survey covering three years' teaching comparisons at the Naval Special Devices Center at Port Washington, New York (available by writing that Center) proves beyond a doubt its superiority over other media of instruction, this with, of course, older boys now in our Navy. Extensive research experiments are now going on under grants from the Ford Foundation to discover its effects at many different grade levels. In fact, the Ford Foundation has given a total of more than two million dollars this year to educational television — over half to educational institutions and allied groups and the remainder to the television industry to produce programs of wide educational appeal. This is straight thinking, for it not only spreads the work-load but it recognizes each element in the American system of broadcasting for what it is worth.

There are now about 138 non-commercial educational radio stations; they are spread out over the country in universities, colleges and school systems. Some are FM in the 88-92 megacycle band; about thirty more are AM, long established for almost the entire period we have had radio. There is only one educational television station at present because of the freeze on frequency assignments, but 209 more have been marked up by the FCC and that will not be enough! Twenty more may become available under unassigned frequencies in the ultra-high frequency band, about to be opened up for use.

We have 109 television stations today. Under proposed plans, we can have a total of about 2,000 stations in all (1,000 less than radio). Problems of financing new stations are as difficult to solve for commercial operation as they are for educational stations. Commercial investment in a single station averages about $500,000 and operating costs are similarly greater than radio. However, educational stations can enter the field more modestly than commercial folk and have greatly lessened operating costs, due to their ability to use student help and to draw on faculty support and departmental budgets, already set up for teaching purposes.

Factors present in television reception when analyzed constructively apply equally to the merchan-

dising of products and the reception of any other form of appeal to the human species: (1) appeal to the emotions, (2) appeal by emphasis to preconceived concepts already established in the mind, (3) appeal to the sense of enjoyment and pleasure associated with past experience. To be completely objective, one can say that all of television is educational in appeal.

The major questions is: what kind of programs will you broadcast? Radio has gone all through that. Hardened and experienced program managers know pretty much what the public wants. The smartest of them give the public not only "what it wants" but also "something that it would want, if it only knew about it." This is the lift in programming so necessary to success in developing new audiences.

The American system of broadcasting gives ample opportunity to serve all phases of education — organized adult education, university and college extension, high school and grade school — through education's own stations, and, lifewise, gives to commercial broadcasting, operating to great nation-wide audiences, the opportunity to broaden its service to include programs of wide and general educational appeal.

What will television do for education? A great deal to help it do its job more effectively. The question, however, of what it will do *to* education, is yet to be answered.

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